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Stairway to Hell: The Yugoslav Rock Scene and Youth during the Crisis Decade of 1981–1991

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Abstract

The article discusses the role of the Yugoslav rock/punk scene in late socialism and the youth as its main consumer and producer, with an emphasis on the responses to the ‘apocalyptic’ shifts in the socio-political arena, generally channeled through various liberal, anti-war, and anti-nationalist initiatives and campaigns. Based on interviews and primary material from the 1980s, the text closely analyses the context of the last Yugoslav decade, the all-encompassing reality and discourse of crisis, as related to the public exposure and responses of the youth and the music circles. The article problematizes the fine line between what was articulated or misinterpreted as anti-system vs. anti-Yugoslav, by arguing that, while consciously channeling rebellious voices directed against the system, the majority of rock artists and urban youth milieus stood and/or actively campaigned against the violence and the dissolution of the state.

Keywords

youth culture, rock, punk, Yugoslavia, socialism, 1980s

Introduction

A famous song by the 1980s Yugoslav Croatian New Wave band Prljavo kazalište (Dirty Theater) had the following verse: “Jas sam odrastao uz ratne filmove u boji/ Uz narodne pjesme pune boli/ Jas sam stvarno sretno dijete/ Jas sam stvarno sretno dijete” [I grew up with color partisan films/ With folk songs full of pain/ I’m a really happy child/ I’m a really happy child].

Along with an apparent dose of embedded irony, the first two lines are a subtle reference to the two dominant levels of identification, grouping and self-perception in Yugoslav history. The first ideological level is of an overarching, supranational identity (the growing up with partisan movies which offered a heroic, even mythical representation of the liberation battles of WWII), and the second is a sub-ideological level of national identity (an ethnic history of

stories of past injustices and grievances) (Spaskovska 2007). This double loyalty to the narrower ethnic/religious identity and the wider trans- or pan-Slavic, and later a Yugoslav, identity had its manifestation in all spheres of life, just as in music. Like for individuals among the Soviet youth for whom “it did not seem contradictory to be passionate about both Lenin and Led Zeppelin” (Yurchak 2006: 219), for many Yugoslav youths it also appeared plausible to merge an interest in British punk and an endorsement of Yugoslavism or socialism. Indeed, as in the Soviet context, “‘bourgeois’ aesthetics could acquire specific meanings ... and did not necessarily have to contradict the values and realities of socialism” (Yurchak 2006: 210).

The climax of what would later become a conflict between national and supra-national loyalties was reached during the years of the dramatic dissolution of the multinational federation. A lot has been written on the specific and more liberal Yugoslavian type of communism. The country which from the 1960s onwards experienced several waves of liberalization and whose capital in the mid-1960s was “the only Communist capital with a parking problem” (Rusinow 1977: 139) could also boast of a flourishing pop, rock, punk, and new wave scene, which at the end of the 1980s responded in its own way to the all-encompassing crisis. This very issue however has not been studied extensively. Eric Gordy’s *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and Destruction of Alternatives* (1999) provides valuable insights into the resistance of the progressive, anti-nationalist rock ‘n’ roll scene and the usually neglected everyday life, but mainly deals with the Serbian political scene and the ardent nationalist politics of the early 1990s. A greater emphasis on microhistory is found in Stef Jansen’s work, entitled, *Antinationalism: An Ethnography of Resistance in Zagreb and Belgrade*, which traces through personal interviews, memories, and oral recollections the ‘inconvenient truth’ that a lot of ordinary people cherished their multiple, fluid identities and the existence of what one could call the ‘supranational alternative.’

This paper seeks to explore the role of the Yugoslav rock/punk scene during the last decade of the political and economic crisis, its responses to the problematic developments in the political arena, and finally its anti-war and anti-nationalist stands (Spaskovska 2009). Considering the fact that the youth was the main agent, target group, and consumer of Yugoslav rock and punk, the paper will also explore the position of youth in Yugoslav society and its particular relationship to the various musical as well as political trends. As it has been argued, rock/punk music in Yugoslavia was a well-thought reflection on sociopolitical reality, among other things. On many occasions, it was the lyrics which mattered to fans more than the music itself. Consequently, the

paper will argue that the Yugoslav rock scene in the late socialism of the 1980s was often acting as a progressive force, and the majority of it could and did clearly differentiate between anti-system and anti-Yugoslav stands. Therefore the paper would also take into consideration the notion of “apocalypse culture,” a concept particularly relevant in the realm of late socialist youth culture, since “Contributors to ‘apocalypse culture’ view themselves, thus, as social critics, voices warning of dangers ahead, even as prophets offering new visions and new formulas.” (Ramet 1985: 3) The last Yugoslav generation indeed had a lot to say on the societal crisis and its official representatives indeed acted as social critics, while many of the members of the unofficial, sub-cultural and artistic milieus assumed the role of prophets.

All the while consciously channeling rebellious voices directed against the system, the majority of rock artists stood against the violent dissolution of the state, which was both a pragmatic and an emotional attitude in that a stable Yugoslav polity represented first and foremost a large and established market and an audience which counted in the millions. As Gordy intelligently observes, “the most crucial factors that supported the autonomous rock and roll cultures of Yugoslavia’s cities before the war disappeared with the war: open communication and contact between urban centers and a sizable audience of young people” (1999: 125). Hence, one could plausibly argue that Yugoslav rock generally stood for critical thinking, cosmopolitanism, openness, and personal autonomy—everything which the later nationalists, war profiteers, and criminal milieus which indulged in kitsch and neo- and turbo-folk despised and undermined.

Communism with a Western Face: The Context of the 1980s

The rock scene and later the punk and new wave scenes were always associated with the youth, progressing from a subculture to a mainstream one. Among the few things which were in essence pan-Yugoslav, the music (pop/rock/punk) scene remained the most prominent one.¹

As a newly established socialist federation, post-WWII Yugoslavia proceeded in widely disseminating the slogans of the antifascist revolution, socialist reconstruction, progress, brotherhood and unity, solidarity, appraisal of the

¹⁾ For more on the resurfacing of a common cultural and economic sphere and renewal of trans-national ties across the former Yugoslavia, see: Tim Judah, “Yugoslavia is Dead, Long Live the Yugosphere,” *LSEE – Research on South Eastern Europe Papers* (2009).

working class, and investing in the youth. Thus, the official state policies considerably emphasized the importance of the youth, as a new identity (and one could claim a new youth class) was being shaped through the state's cultural strategies and established myths. An emerging Yugoslav identification, a supraethnic or even anational self-perception was progressively being spread and accepted among the youth. As it has been argued: "Yugoslav identification also provided a way of breaking with an increasingly discredited past, especially among the younger—it was a protest against traditional nationalist politics that seemed to be at the heart of the region's problems" (Sekulic et al. 1994: 83–97).

Furthermore, President Tito and ideological theorist Edvard Kardelj are said to have personally decided against the repressive responses to rock and roll music which were adopted elsewhere in the communist East and no Party forum undertook campaigning against rock music or obstructing concerts (Ramet 2002). It is evident that this decision had most probably been taken with a great dose of pragmatism, yet it significantly contributed to the opening and development of the Yugoslav cultural and music scenes and the positive image of Yugoslavia abroad. Moreover, the band Bijelo Dugme (White Button) was invited to perform for President Tito on New Year's Eve in 1975 at the Croatian National Theatre ("Bijelo Dugme," internet file). An illustrative example of the relative liberty and tolerance which stood in contrast to other socialist countries is offered by Rüdiger Rossig, a German journalist who spent a long time in the region. Author of the book *Ex-Yugos-Junge MigrantInnen aus Jugoslawien und seinen Nachfolgestaaten in Deutschland*, he claims that from the perspective of comparison to Eastern Germany, "SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] was a super liberal state. As a young punker, on several occasions when I was visiting relatives in East Germany, the officials would not let me cross the border just because they did not like the way I looked: the leather jacket, the Dr. Martens boots, or the haircut. In SFRY no one would even look at me. This was the feeling of freedom" (Hilmi 2009: 56). Similarly, a 1995 documentary noted: "There were days when I regretted that Belgrade wasn't Amsterdam, but there were many more when I was pleased that it was not East Berlin" (Collin 2001: 9). As those who lived through the 1980s and were active consumers of the rock/punk/new wave scene recall, "Yugoslavia was not part of Western culture as an active participant but it had a chance to be an active observer, which was not the case with the rest of the communist countries. I remember I was occasionally sending records to one guy in Moscow, an agricultural engineer, young and smart fellow ... He never received half of the records I sent him" (Mandichevski 2010).

In this context, a 1984 Radio Free Europe report entitled “Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Stay in Communist Europe” noted that “hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovaks flock to musically wide-open Yugoslavia for their vacations,” whereas in the Yugoslav capital “television shows, the latest videos and local groups go by names like Dorian Grey, Film, Video Sex and Electric Orgasm” (HU OSA 300-10-2. 496). 1980 saw the release of the now classical album *Paket aranžman* (Box Set), a compilation of songs by Belgrade bands Šarlo Akrobata (Serbian for “Charlie Chaplin”), Električni orgazam (Electric Orgasm) and Idoli (Idols): “It brought new forms in music (punk and new wave) and new contents in the lyrics. It raised rock on a higher intellectual level and finally established it as a movement and main cultural expression of the young people in the country. A new spirit was being spread all around the country establishing itself as one of the best music scenes in Europe” (Mandichevski 2010). Therefore, it should not have come as a surprise that in 1981 *New Musical Express*, the UK music magazine, rated Electric Orgasm as one of the finest bands in Europe and listed Belgrade’s club *Akademija* as one of the best European music clubs (Gordy 1999). Situated at the Faculty of Fine Arts, the club was run by Miomir Grujić Fleka, who after having lived in London and having hung out with people like British film director and musician Don Letts, made an attempt to transplant part of the much revered British punk/rock scene and experience onto Yugoslav soil (Collin 2001).

It was in particular during the 1980s that the scene expanded considerably and according to *Rock* magazine, figures ranged from 2,874 professional and amateur bands in 1982 to 30–50 professional and around 5,000 amateur groups in 1987 – an estimate given by Petar Popović, an international label manager for RTB-PGP Records (Ramet 1994: 109). The figures of production and sale compared to present-day standards seem almost utopian: in 1986 one of the country’s largest record companies, Jugoton from Zagreb, produced about one million rock records and cassettes, while well-known rock bands were selling between 200,000–500,000, and smaller punk bands between 20,000–50,000 copies (Ramet 1994). A major breakthrough as far as numbers are concerned was the 1975 album by Bijelo dugme (White Button) “Šta bi dao da si na mom mjestu” (What would you give to be in my place). Recorded in London, it sold more than 200,000 copies—the first album to sell in those quantities—and made *Jugoton* introduce the title of a “diamond LP.” Moreover, the Yugoslav record companies were also issuing licensed records from Western European and US musicians, although occasionally with interventions of ideological nature, such as in the case of the “Growers of Mushroom” album by the UK band Leaf Hound, which for the Yugoslav

market was released under the title “Leaf Hound: Leaf Hound” and with the title song omitted (Mandichevski 2010).

The most prominent and popular bands originated from all the corners of Yugoslavia, belonged to different streams and styles within rock and punk and included: Azra, Zabranjeno pušenje (Smoking Forbidden), Prljavo kazalište (Dirty Theater), Haustor, Laibach, Bulldozer, Pankrti (Bastards), Leb i sol (Bread and Salt), Ekaterina Velika (EKV), Električni orgazam (Electric Orgasm), Idoli (Idols), Partibrejkers (Partybreakers), Bijelo dugme (White Button), Riblja čorba (Fish Soup), Film, Parni valjak (Steamroller), and many others. At a certain point in their careers most of them had produced provocative songs, some of which were indeed publicly criticized and in some rare cases in this period of the 1980s even censored. For example, the Sarajevo ‘new primitivism’² band Zabranjeno pušenje (Smoking Forbidden) caused a public debate in 1985 with their song *Zenica Blues* (HU OSA 300-10-2. 496). It has to be noted however that the debates were provoked and issues raised by individual journalists, and in this case it was the Secretary of the local League of Socialist Youth who officially protested against the media attacks. A similar 1985 case was of the public debate over the act of putting the Yugoslav anthem on the album of cult band Bijelo dugme (White Button). The proposal by the Youth League of the city of Rijeka for the album to be removed from the market eventually did not materialize and had no wider support whatsoever. Most prominently, punk band concerts or different gatherings were often interrupted or banned (Tomc 2010).

Thus, from the late seventies rock music in Yugoslavia opened up a new platform for debate over social issues, the exchange of ideas, and intelligent criticism of social phenomena such as nationalism or outdated ideology. Indeed, “rock music, thanks to its mass popularity, was the best way for infiltration of new political ideas and concepts” (Mandichevski 2010).

² *Novi primitivizam* (New Primitivism) was a Sarajevo-based music and cultural phenomenon from the first half of the 1980s, most notably connected to the bands Zabranjeno pušenje (Smoking Forbidden), Elvis J. Kurtović, and the now iconic TV show *Top Lista Nadrealista* (Top List of Surrealists). In a partial response to the Slovenian *Novi kolektivizam* (New Collectivism), *Neue Slovenische Kunst*, and punk (see below), the New Primitives based their aesthetics on local Bosnian humor and urban/street Sarajevo subculture. The first album by Zabranjeno pušenje *Das ist Walter*, released in 1984 in 3,000 copies by Zagreb’s Jugoton (after being refused by Belgrade’s record company PGP-RTB), eventually sold around 100,000 copies. See the episode dedicated to “New Primitivism”: “XXIV strana,” *Rockovnik* (Belgrade: Radio Television Serbia, 2010).

Facing East, Looking West: The Yugoslav Youth in the 1980s

US-based Macedonian film director Darko Mitrevski recently wrote: “Milošević is the person who put an end to my generation’s youth. Until his appearance, our main preoccupations were the new wave and the new primitivism (in music), the new square (in comics), the new Yugoslav directors of the so-called ‘Czech school’ (in film), the new theatre plays at the Macedonian Open Theatre festival, the new LPs at *Jugoton*...” (Mitrevski 2010).

Studies focusing on the notion of Yugoslavism³, on the common identity and on the ethnic composition of Yugoslavia, underline the fact that the categories which were most likely to identify as Yugoslav were the urban residents, the young, those from nationally mixed parentage, the Communist Party members, and the minorities (Sekulic et al. 1994: 83–97). The youth, which became particularly prominent during the 1980s, however, was certainly not a homogenous category. Slovenian sociologists make a provisional division of three time spans when analyzing the youth, pointing to the period 1945–1965 as the time when the Party had a paternalistic attitude towards the young, aiming at shaping it as a socially and ideologically homogenous group (Ule 1999). The periods 1965–1985 and post-1989 were marked by the loosening of ideological pressure and the increase of youth progressive movements with local and transnational span.

In January 1987 in an interview for the daily *Borba*, Hashim Rexhepi, the then President of the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (LSYY) stated: “We want the [alternative] movements to become an integral part of the LSYY. After all, socialism too is a movement” (Mlakar 1987). Moreover, the successful proliferation of the ecological and environmentalist groups/movement in Yugoslavia received a public acknowledgement when in May 1989 the Federal Assembly passed a law barring any further construction of nuclear plants (Denitch 1990).

The formal organization of the youth into state-sponsored associations and leagues⁴ was therefore not immune to the democratizing tendencies.

³ Between the 1971 and the 1981 federal censuses, the number of individuals who declared “Yugoslav” increased from 273,077 to 1,219,024 (from 1.3% to 5.4%). There was no consensus at an official level whether to treat “Yugoslav” as a national belonging or, rather, as it remained the case, as “nationally undeclared.” Communist elites preferred to refer to a “Yugoslav socialist patriotism,” emphasizing the ideological/socialist rather than the national dimension.

⁴ In the final grade of primary school (age 14) all students were admitted to the League of the Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (*Savez socijalističke omladine Jugoslavije*), with the possibility later

During the 1980s, the LSYY grew more and more distant and independent from the political realm, the number of young people seeking membership in the League of Communists started decreasing and the youth voiced some of the first requests for change, well before concrete political initiatives were taken up. In this wide network, the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia (LSYS, ZSMS in Slovenian) was the first to deviate from the official line and in the 1980s it gradually reformed itself into a more autonomous body which provided space for alternative forms of youth organization, strengthening its opposition role at the twelfth Krško Congress of 1986, until its abolishment at the 1989 Portorož Congress and transformation into a political party (Vaupotič and Čeplak 1999). On the Yugoslav level, at the 1986 Congress of the LSYY a 22-point program was adopted for the changing/reforming of Yugoslavia (Kovač 1988). In May 1988 the LSYY organized the last celebration of the Youth Day (the 25th of May, originally celebrated as Tito's birthday), but in a very different manner, omitting the traditional Baton of youth, without any ideological symbols, Tito's portrait, or Yugoslav Army cadets. Rather unusually, the celebrations began in Novi Sad with a discussion on the current societal crisis (HU OSA 300-10-2. 496). Similarly, in September 1988, following the unfolding of the Kosovo crisis, the LSYY issued an official statement blaming the "almost totally inefficient political system" for "a situation which is closer to fratricidal war than to the progressive solution of the problems" (HU OSA 300-10-2. 496). The statement also advocated free elections, a market economy, individual and public accountability at all levels, a culture of dialogue, and an internally integrated Yugoslavia. The youth at this point seemed to have been more socially and politically aware than the political elites, as the Presidency of the LSYY further stated: "We want to discuss the fate of our homeland today because it may be too late if left for tomorrow. We do not accept solutions which offer arms and blood because we know that when the guns stop firing and blood stops flowing we shall be neither freer nor richer ... We are for a Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia in which understanding, progress, and democracy prevail" (HU OSA 300-10-2. 496).

A general trend especially among the urban, educated youth was the above-mentioned supra-ethnic, antinationalist attitude. A research paper published immediately before the Yugoslav dissolution reveals an additional indicator of the cosmopolitan, supranational sense of belonging, recalling the results of a

to get a voluntary transfer to the League of Communists (the Party). The category of "*omladinac*" (a young person) was considered to last until the age of 28.

wide federal survey of the attitudes and values among youth: asked to declare their “objective” and their “preferred” national identity, 34 percent of children from mixed ethnic parentage declared to have an “objective” Yugoslav identity, while 14 percent of children from homogenous marriages also did so; while 51 percent of mixed-marriage children “preferred” to identify as Yugoslav, 35 percent of homogenous parentage also had the same preference (Burg and Berbaum 1989: 535–554).

A wide all-Yugoslav empirical sociological research entirely dedicated to the youth, led by the eminent Croatian sociologist Srđan Vrcan, conducted in 1985/1986 among 6,841 young people between the ages of 14–27 revealed several crucial facts, among which what was termed “the crisis paradox” (Miheljak 1996: 264). The results indicated that only 32.2 percent of the respondents in Slovenia were in favor of an optimistic perspective regarding the future, while optimism was highest in the Republic of Macedonia and the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, i.e., in the least developed Yugoslav regions.

These results further emphasize the fact that Slovenia was the first republic in the Yugoslav federation where the youth showed serious forms of rebellion against the social reality, among other things the “schism between private cultural orientations and public normative demands” (Tomc 2010). Among the various factors which contributed to the process of disillusionment among the youth, one could also single out the economic crisis which was gradually becoming omnipresent in the early 1980s and was particularly felt by the youth as the most vulnerable social group. Not only 80% (around one million) of all unemployed Yugoslavs in the mid-1980s were young people under 27 (Zukin 1985), but also the youth were facing discrepancies and manifestations

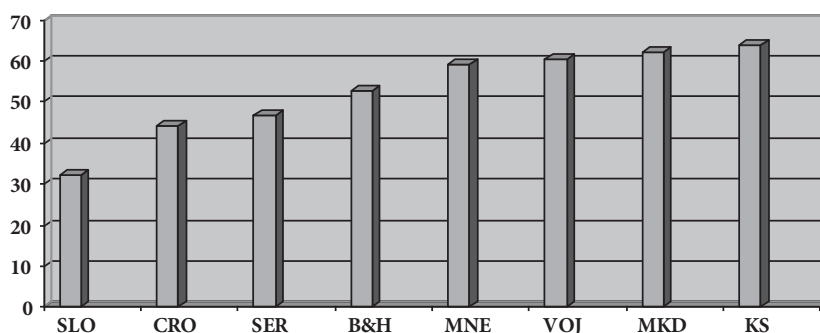


Figure 1. Is the coming year going to be better or worse than 1990? (Percentage of those who answered that it would be better).

of societal hypocrisy in many other spheres. Thus, criticism was also directed towards the establishment of a “red bourgeoisie” which stood in stark contrast to the formally upheld socialist values.⁵

Outside of the official youth circles, the late seventies and the eighties brought an eruption of new forms of music and art. Or, in other words, “punk rock had shocked and catalyzed the Yugoslav cultural landscape” (Collin 2001: 12). As Mandichevski argues, the quantity expansion led to quality differentiation, but this in turn created the base for a serious rock scene. The punk, rock, and new wave virus which spread among the Yugoslav youth is well portrayed by the documentary *Sretno dijete* by Igor Mirković, illuminating both the intra-Yugoslav ties and the specificities of the various local scenes.

In the eyes of the regime, the Slovenian band Laibach was the most controversial. With their name coming from the German name for the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, reminiscent of the German occupation years during WWII, from the very beginning the band was predestined to be perceived as a stunning provocation to the political and the social context of the time. Under a ban to perform from 1983 until 1987 precisely because of the name, Laibach was the most original and challenging artistic, cultural, and musical phenomenon in late socialist Yugoslavia, part of the NSK (*Neue Slovenische Kunst*) network. As Robert Botteri observed: “I always saw them as having the same function as *Mladina* [the youth magazine]—the opening, the sensitization of a certain space. They were a mirror of the society, showing things which the society wanted to hide from itself, they revealed the totalitarian image of the society which the society didn’t want to see for itself.” Laibach’s use of the Yugoslav iconography and self-management discourse (along with elements of Slavic paganism, (post) punk, industrial and *Kraftwerk*-style sounds) led to what they called “political poetry” or the “unmasking of social neurosis.” Ardent critics of market-driven capitalism (“Nazi-fascism under the disguise of democracy is the rule of financial capital itself”; “War is capitalism with its

⁵ Here, however, it is crucial to draw the distinction between the anti-system dimension and what would later become an often unfounded accusation of an anti-Yugoslav orientation. As Robert Botteri (July 2007), former editor-in-chief of the Slovenian youth magazine *Mladina* and present creative director, stated: “In no way whatsoever were we [in *Mladina*] anti-Yugoslav. We simply wanted to be able to do what the media is doing in a democratic society—to describe the reality around us. Freedom of expression... As for the category of anti-Yugoslav—I’d be more precise, since we were often reproached for this—if we are for democracy, it means we support democracy everywhere, in this case it was in Yugoslavia and this did not mean we were anti-Yugoslav.”

gloves off”), in the 1980s they assumed a very ambiguous reflective and performative standpoint; their aesthetics escapes definition or precise categorization in ideological or cultural terms, essentially reflecting upon the relationship between art and politics, and “‘rendering audible’ of the hidden codes and internal contradictions of a series of artistic, musical, political, linguistic, and historical ‘regimes’” (Monroe 2005: 7; Tomc 2010).

The 1987 “Poster Affair,” on the other hand, related to the public stirring caused by the controversial poster for the 1987 Baton of Youth rally, was signed by the art design studio *Novi Kolektivizem* (NK), also part of the *Neue Slovenische Kunst* movement. On 28 February 1987, the Belgrade daily *Politika* revealed the original precedent of the poster—a painting from the Nazi-era entitled “The Third Reich” by the German Richard Klein, in which the symbols were merely replaced (Vurnik 2007).

That same year brought Slobodan Milošević onto the political scene, while the year after, Bijelo dugme (White Button) released their last album where they sang: “When the war starts/ What we gonna do/ You and me, my baby?/ Will we cover ourselves in a blanket/ And kiss each other ‘til it’s over?” As on many occasions thus far, the musicians and bands were the first to speak out and point out or criticize serious flaws, malpractices, or negative phenomena in Yugoslav society. But yet again, they were not powerful enough to influence or change them.

From Rock for Peace to Rocked Peace: Yugoslav Anti-War Responses

The theory of the “public versions” proposed by Richard Johnson emphasizes the fact that the media and the religious, educational, and political institutions produce certain public versions of identity: “There is also a process of evaluation whereby the values of certain classes, institutions or groups are presented as national values and others are excluded ... All this goes to show that the discursive process of constructing a cultural identity can easily become ideological if it conceals real diversities and antagonisms in society” (Larrain 1994: 164). Projected onto the ex-Yugoslav context, this clearly illuminates an analogy: both the Yugoslav and the post-Yugoslav (predominantly nationalistic) political discourses were aiming at this uniformity and exclusivity of truths and values, directing a special attention to the ideological “conversion” of the youth. As Kovač notes, “nationalism is produced within the very structure of the Yugoslav system, its main root cause being the lack of institutionalized democracy” (Kovač 1988: 115).

It was indeed the nationalist euphoria and the violent dissolution of the country which had a profound effect on the Yugoslav rock scene. Most of the core rock bands raised their voices against the emerging violence, the ultra-nationalist discourses, and the looming dissolution of the country, in the same manner as they did previously against some of the totalitarian traits of the Yugoslav system. Even Laibach, which was seen as the primary critic of the authoritarian traits of Yugoslav society, with the same fervor rejected the new postsocialist order. In their interviews, Laibach ardently and intelligently criticized capitalism, Western hegemony and militarism, in particular through the albums “Kapital” (1992) and “NATO” (1994), thus tracing a supra-ideological and all-embracing paradigm and vision transcending both communism and capitalism.

One could claim that the progressive Yugoslav rock bands which previously did not hesitate to create songs with political and engaged messages, even the mainstream Bijelo dugme (White Button), certainly wanted a different Yugoslavia, but a Yugoslavia nevertheless. As Gordy rightly notes, “with a rural- and regional-oriented nationalist elite taking the place of an urban-oriented communist elite, peasants and ‘urban-peasants’ colonized the cultural space that rock and roll youth once dominated” (Gordy 1999: 114). In this sense, the rock scene had a real interest in protesting this threat, as well as the rise of nationalism and the ‘offensive’ of the province on the cities which generally stood for cosmopolitanism, culture, and neglect of the ethnic and the epic.

The beginning of violence and the breakup brought along the dissolution of Bijelo dugme (White Button), of legendary Azra (whose self-exiled leader Johnny Štulić refuses any type of contact with ex-Yugoslav media), and the split of Zabranjeno pušenje (Smoking Forbidden) which now has a Belgrade and a Sarajevo branch, among others. The market irretrievably shrank and the circulation of bands and musicians across republican borders did not resume until years later, once the hostilities died down in 1995.

In the midst of the nationalist euphoria and symbolic stigmatizations of the Other, the rock scene initiated and organized several peace, or “Rock for Peace,” concerts and manifestations where they voiced their protest against the current developments in Yugoslavia.⁶ Most of them took place during 1991, the last year of the existence of the federation, when sporadic armed incidents already were occurring by the spring and the worst scenario was materializing.

⁶ These could be said to have had as a predecessor the 1985 “YU Rock Misija” (YU Rock Mission) campaign, concert, and song release, which gathered the elite of Yugoslav pop/rock music and contributed to Bob Geldof’s Band Aid famine relief campaign.

In August 1991, Zaječar, the host town of the famous “Gitarijada” (Guitar Fest), gathered bands from all over Yugoslavia playing in front of a crowd of 20,000. There followed similar peace concerts featuring the most well known Yugoslav rock bands and other artists in Dubrovnik and Pula (Croatia) and in Ljubljana (Slovenia) as late as October 1991 (Ramet 1994).

In Macedonia an event entitled “Peace in the World – Peace in Our Country” was held in March 1991 in the large hall of the National Theatre which at this occasion was absolutely crowded (Mironska 1991). UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar sent a message of greeting and support to the manifestation, while the general message conveyed was that “this modest act is dedicated to our ideal of a peaceful coexistence between Macedonians and Albanians, Serbs and Albanians, Slovenes and Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics, of everyone in our country” (Mironska 1991). Performing at the gathering were Bosnian-Serb singer Zdravko Čolić, Croat singer Tereza Kesovija, Bijelo Dugme (White button) leader Goran Bregović, Leb i sol (Bread and Salt) leader Vlatko Stefanovski, famous film and theatre directors who held speeches, poets and writers—one of them Izet Karajlić from Sarajevo, journalists—among them Laszlo Tot from Novi Sad, well-known actors, opera singers, and ballet dancers. It was certainly more than just a rock concert for peace.

A peace initiative which marked its eighteenth anniversary in April 2010 was “Rimtutituki,” a Belgrade-based association of several rock bands (Električni orgazam, Partibrejkers, and EKV). Primarily an anti-war initiative, it organized several peace concerts, the largest one in April 1992 gathering some 50,000 people (Ramet 1994). They recorded the anti-war song “*Slušaj vamo (mir brate, mir) [Listen here (peace, brother, peace)]*,” organized several anti-war events under the slogans “*With a Barricade Against Barricades*,” “*Don’t Count on Us*” (“*Mir, brate, mir’ ponovo na ulicama*” 2010), and clearly related the above-mentioned threat posed by the nationalist ideology embodied by Serb President Slobodan Milošević and the militarism he propagated. The name of the initiative “Rimtutituki” is a difficult to translate Serb slang phrase (“*turim ti kitu*”) which vaguely denotes sexual intercourse and would be best described as a curse. The song itself sent out strong messages which resonated throughout the 1980s with the anti-war Yugoslav youth: “*Nećemo da pobedi narodna muzika/ Više volim tebe mladu/ nego pušku da mi dadu/ Mir! Mir brate, mir!*” [We don’t want folk music to win/ I would rather have you, young girl/ than a gun/ Peace! Peace brother, peace!]. At the big anti-Milošević/anti-war demonstrations in Belgrade all of the musicians involved in the project stood on an open truck cruising the city’s streets, performing the song and distributing the single record to protesters (Mandichevski 2010; “*Mir, brate, mir’ ponovo na ulicama*” 2010).

However, the biggest manifestation of this kind where the rock scene was also prominently present was held in Sarajevo. The initiative “YUTEL za mir” (YUTEL for Peace) on the rainy day of 28 July 1991 gathered around 80,000 people from all over Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslavia at a large event with the participation of the most prominent Yugoslav musicians, artists (most notably actor Rade Šerbedžija), students (The Student League for Peace in Yugoslavia), civil society activists, politicians (Macedonian representative to the federal Presidency, Vasil Tupurkovski), and youth, workers, miners, etc. It was noted that *Zetra*, the Sarajevo Olympic Sports Hall, was never so overcrowded. With Yugoslav flags, slogans from the audience, and statements such as “This is a war of Yugoslavs against Yugoslavs,” “Chase out politics from our homes,” “Ne daj se, Jugo” (Don’t surrender, Yugoslavia!), and denouncing the “epidemic of nationalism,” the gathering which was supposed to have its continuation on 3 October 1991 not only revealed a popular enthusiasm for the common state, but also a radical dissatisfaction with the current nationalist power games. Performing rock and pop bands and musicians included EKV, singing their famous song “Ovo je zemlja za nas” (This is a country for us), Goran Bregović, Bajaga i Instruktori (Bajaga and Instructors), Plavi orkestar (Blue orchestra), Crvena jabuka (Red apple), Indeksi (Indexes), Regina, Dino Merlin, Hari Mata Hari, the leading vocal of Zabranjeno pušenje (Smoking Forbidden), Nenad Janković, and others. For a moment, it seemed credible that music, art, and the voices of the thousands of ordinary Yugoslavs could be more powerful and restore common sense.⁷

Conclusion

In all of the countries of the former Yugoslavia there are stereotypes which want to represent that country as something abnormal or unnatural which caused us pain and

⁷⁾ The rock scene however did not remain immune to ethnonationalism. 1992 saw the release of the “Rock for Croatia” album with anti-war but nationalist colored songs, including many former prominent Yugoslav names such as Psihomodo Pop, Parni valjak (Steamroller), Jura Stublić (Film), and the controversial but locally popular Croatian band Thompson which endorses pro-fascist and anti-Semitic views in their lyrics and outlook. Also, other musicians and bands such as Riblja čorba (Fish Soup), the Belgrade branch of Zabranjeno pušenje (Smoking Forbidden), and band member and prominent film director Emir Kusturica on quite a few occasions publicly expressed controversial and nationalistically coded statements.

suffering. I don't think that Yugoslavia was some perfect country, but I do not accept this type of falsification of experiences; I think that Yugoslavia is one great story which needs to be told, and not forgotten (Gligorijević 2009, excerpt from an interview with Jergović).

Almost twenty years after the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, a vibrant common music, art, and cultural space seems to be the only and for that matter the most powerful thing which is left. The once most prominent Yugoslav rock/punk bands are now regularly touring the countries of the former Yugoslavia, reuniting like in the case of Bijelo dugme (White Button) and Leb i sol (Bread and Salt), or organizing so-called tributes as in the case of Azra. The 2005 reuniting tour of Bijelo dugme in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb was most likely the event of the year, as the estimated audience in Belgrade was counted in the hundreds of thousands. Big names which gained prominence immediately after the dissolution such as Rambo Amadeus, Darkwood Dub, or Hladno Pivo (Cold Beer) already have their place in this now established ex-Yugoslav/ex-home music scene.

The rock/punk scene in Yugoslavia was more often than not acting as a corrective, a critical and intelligent observer of social realities, assuming a progressive and critical role even during the last years of emerging violence and nationalist madness. Indeed, a lot of bands which pursued their musical careers preserved this role. One of them is Laibach which in 1994 ventured into the "Occupied Europe NATO Tour 1994–1995." The *NATO* album, according to the band, was a response to the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the democratization revolutions in Eastern Europe, and the North-Atlantic Alliance concept of collective security ("NATO," internet file), while the second part of the mentioned "Occupied Europe" Tour included concerts in Hungary, Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic, marking the 50th anniversary of the victory over fascism ("In the Army Now," internet file). The band's concert in Sarajevo at the time of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, or the song entitled "Slovenia" (advocating a kind of pan-Slavism) indeed are a proof of the non-conformist, oppositional, provocative stands, and intelligent criticism the band has always assumed against the mainstream ruling ideologies. Of course, Laibach is only one of many possible examples. The leader of the Slovenian band Zaklonišče prepeva (Singing Shelter), Vanja Alič, observed that they formed their band in 1994 as a provocation to the nationalistic mainstream and a reaction to the radical break with the Yugoslav past, underlining that having grown up with the Yugoslav rock scene and having been influenced by it, it was only natural that this region has its own

shared themes.⁸ The band is part of the wider ‘Balkan scene,’ a Slovenian cultural phenomenon also alluded to as “ex-home” culture (Velikonja 2002), which is related to all the sociocultural symbols of the former Yugoslavia: the music, the cinematography, TV production, Yugoslav sport, etc. This sprouting postsocialist scenery of the red star next to or versus the yellow European star (Velikonja 2005) and the ex-Yugoslav socialist symbols during student protests imply the appearance of a new sociocultural milieu and urban iconography, which is both cultural, anti-globalist, as well as commercial. “Titostalgia” (Velikonja 2008), Yugonostalgia, communist nostalgia, and postsocialist nostalgia have emerged as the umbrella terms used to describe the various types of longing for, evocation of, or reflecting on a past which happens to be socialist in the life stories of many formerly East Germans or Southeastern Europeans.⁹

Yugoslavia with its 22 million inhabitants represented a solid market for rock bands, as the most famous among them regularly did two-month tours of the country, or were selling as many as 200,000 copies of some of their albums. Most of them both emotionally and pragmatically advocated for the peace and preservation of Yugoslavia and initiated or supported with their performances many anti-war and anti-nationalist concerts and initiatives. That is why, it seems, musicians were the first to cross borders and to be welcomed back ‘in the enemy’s camp’ once the hostilities ended. Indeed, “even before business or sport elites did, bands and musicians were working on the reconstruction of the mutual market” (Mandichevski 2010). Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav rock and roll, punk, and all their variations thus remained to be generally synonymous with cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, progressivism, urban culture, and in certain cases Yugonostalgia, or, Yugo-futurism, as some would like to say (Hilmi 2009: 56).

⁸) The band uses classical Yugoslav iconography and lyrics are in Serbo-Croatian. Their songs are critical of the present reality, having sociopolitical connotations, also related to the former Yugoslav region. Some of the album titles, for example, are *Novo vreme stare dileme* (New Times, Old Dilemmas) and *Glasajte za nas* (Vote for Us).

⁹) See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Oksana Sarkisova and Peter Apor, eds., *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums After 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008); Daphne Berdahl, *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); and Ljubica Spaskovska, “Recommunaisance: On the Phenomenon of Communist Nostalgia in Slovenia and Poland,” *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 17, no. 1 (2008): 136–150.

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